

Psychopathy and Harm Avoidance as Mediators in the Pathway between Childhood Maltreatment and Adult Attachment Style

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Research Questions

- RQ1:** Is there a relationship between childhood maltreatment and attachment style?
- RQ2:** Is there a relationship between childhood maltreatment and personality traits (i.e. psychopathy and harm avoidance)?
- RQ3:** Is there a relationship between personality traits and attachment style?
- RQ4:** Do personality traits mediate the pathway from childhood maltreatment to attachment style in adulthood?

Method

Participants

The sample utilized regarding psychopathy consisted of 122 undergraduate college students. The sample utilized for the harm avoidance section consisted of 64 undergraduate students. Both samples were 73% female-identifying and had a mean age of 19 years.

Measures

- Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ), which includes subscales measuring physical abuse (PA), physical neglect (PN), emotional abuse (EA), emotional neglect (EN), and sexual abuse (SA), as well as a total score.
- Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R), which is broken into anxious and avoidant attachment
- Psychopathic Personality Inventory-Revised (PPI-R), which includes 8 subscales.
- Harm Avoidance (HA) scale of the Tridimensional Personality Questionnaire (TPQ)

Results

Psychopathy

RQ1: ECR-R Anx. Attach. was most significantly related to CTQ Total. **RQ2:** PPI-R Blame Externalization (BE) was most significantly related to CTQ Total. **RQ3:** ECR-R Anx. Attach. was most significantly related to PPI-R BE. **RQ4:** See **Figure 1**.

Harm Avoidance

RQ1: ECR-R Anx. Attach. was most significantly related to CTQ Sexual Abuse. **RQ2:** HA Antic. Worry was most significantly related to CTQ SA. **RQ3:** ECR-R Anx. Attach was significantly related to HA Antic. Worry. **RQ4:** See **Figure 2**.

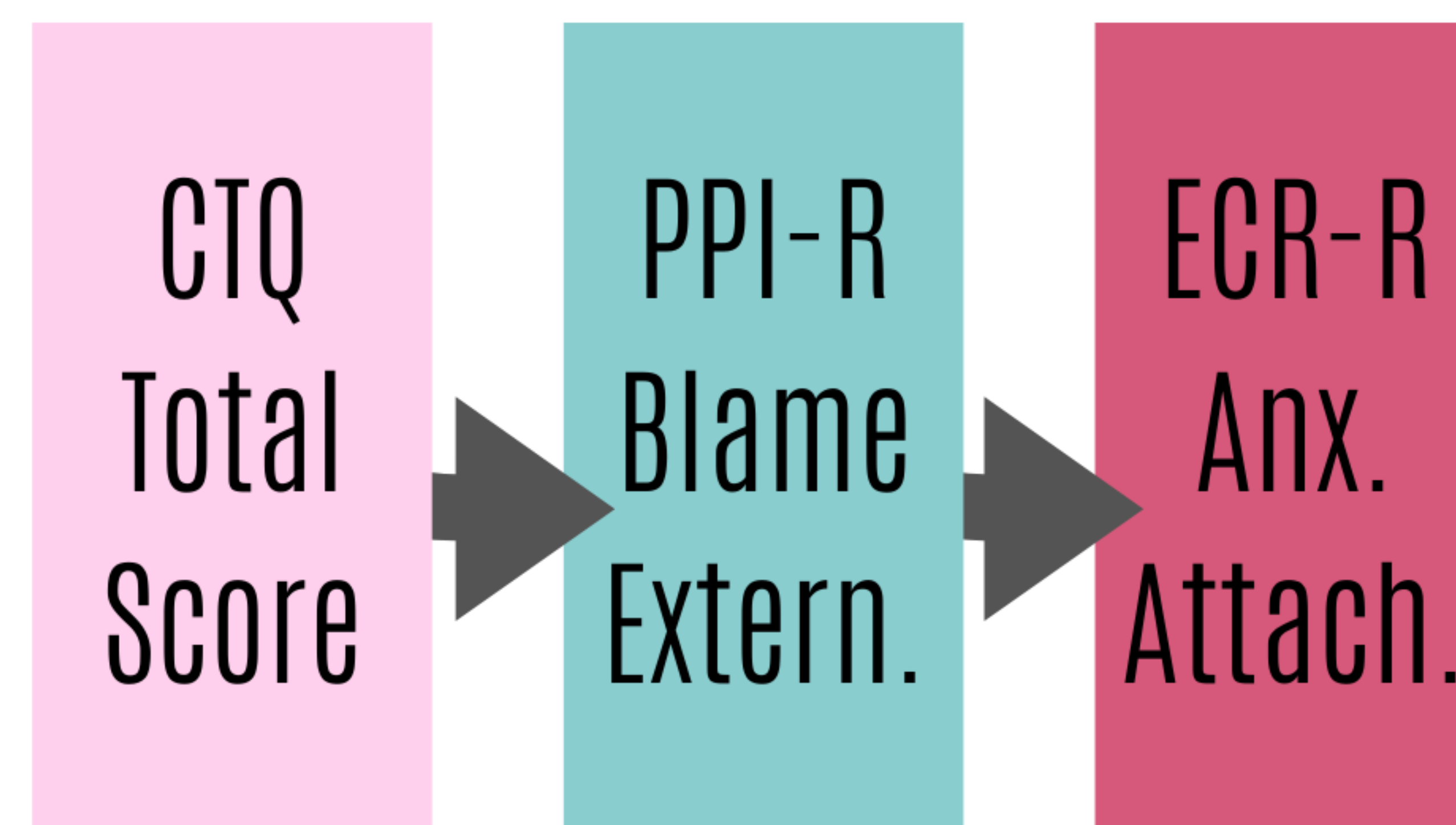


Figure 1. PPI-R Blame Externalization partially mediated the relationship between CTQ Total Score and ECR-R Anxious Attachment.

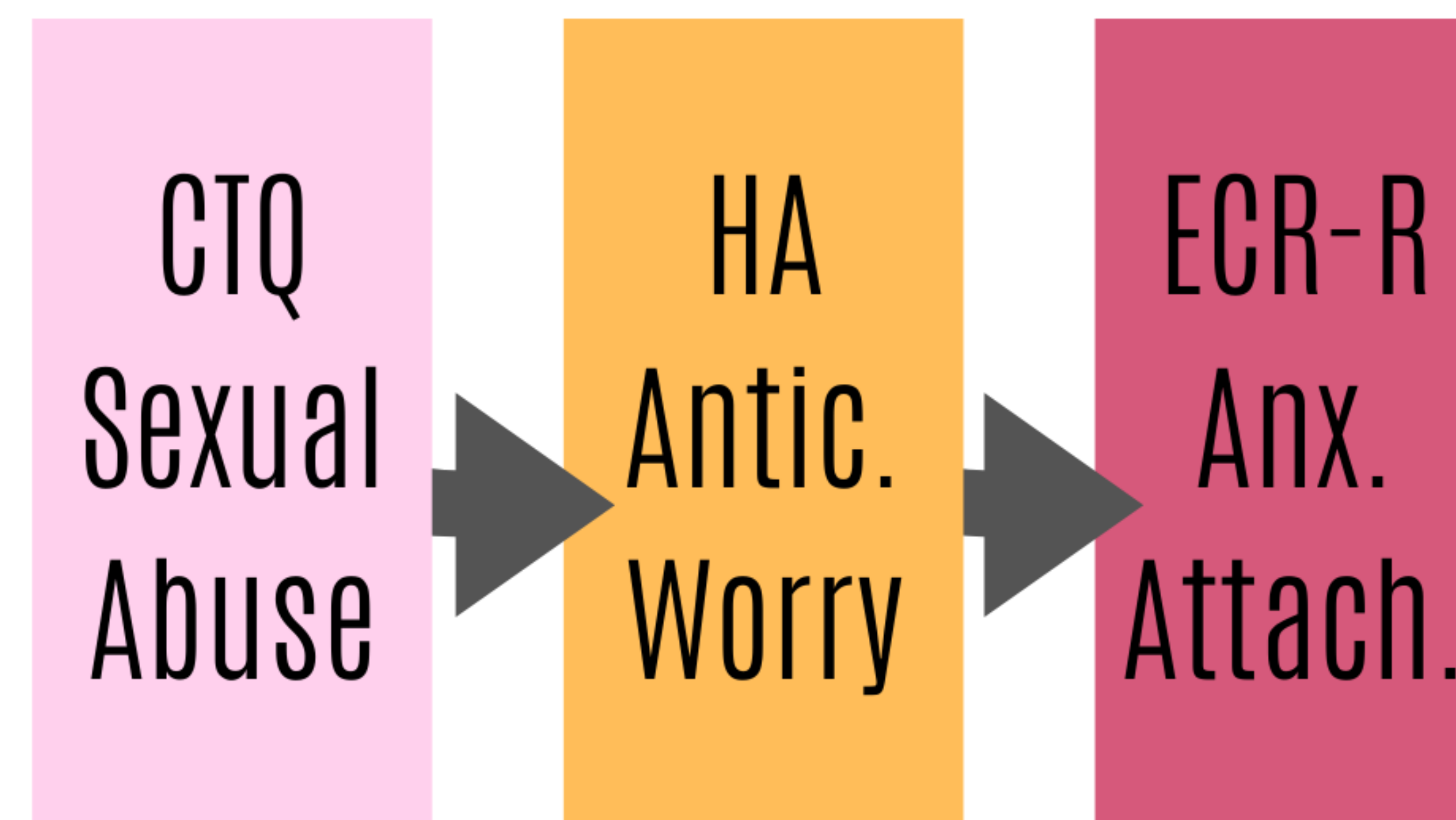


Figure 2. The Anticipatory Worry subscale of Harm Avoidance fully mediated the relationship between CTQ Sexual Abuse and ECR-R Anxious Attachment.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that college students with a CM history are at risk for both psychopathic and harm avoidant traits that result in anxious attachment in their close interpersonal relationships. This suggests that individual differences in current anxious attachment style are predicted both by the direct pathway between extent of CM history and anxious attachment, and by the indirect pathway that involves personality components as a mediator. These findings contribute to our understanding of the mechanisms that underlie the relationship between childhood maltreatment and attachment style in adulthood. Our novel result was the identification of maladaptive personality traits as a mediator between maltreatment and attachment difficulties in college students. While most studies examine these associations with more impaired populations, it is important to continue to investigate the impact of CM history on both personality and interpersonal relations in relatively resilient college students.

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References

